DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 355 442 CE 063 351

TITLE	Principles for the Development of Core Skills across the Curriculum. Core Skills Action Pack.
INSTITUTION	Further Education Unit, London (England).
REPORT NO	ISBN-1-85338-293-0
PUB DATE	93
NOTE	77p.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Classroom Use - Teaching Guides (For Teacher) (052)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC04 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Achievement; Academic Education; *Basic Skills; *Curriculum Development; Educational Administration; Educational Planning; Educational Quality; Foreign Countries; Institutional Administration; *Integrated Curriculum; Postsecondary Education; Program Improvement; Skill Development; Strategic Planning; *Student Evaluation; *Student Participation; Student Responsibility; Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS	Core Skills Project; Great Britain

ABSTRACT

This packet contains a set of principles for core skills development together with corresponding activities for teachers and learners that have been developed in Great Britain. Core skills are defined as transferable skills central to academic, vocational, and personal development. An introduction explains the FEU's principles and guidelines for the core skills development and presents a brief outline of FEU's Core Skills Post-16 project and an update of current national core skills development. Five sets of guidelines are provided, each of which corresponds to a core skills development area: institutional management, planning and developing the curriculum, learner participation and action planning, learning opportunities, and assessing, recording, and reviewing achievement. Each booklet contains a list of principles and activities/criteria by which institutions, teams, or individuals can judge their core skills development in that area; examples of activities and quotations from the project colleges illustrating them; and key findings and recommendations in each area arising from the project work. A set of action sheets contains the lists of principles and suggested activities in all five areas. These can be completed by teams or individuals to plan or review their own progress in core skills development. The last item is a glossary. (YLB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED355442

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

N McGoff

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Principles for the development of core skills across the curriculum

CE 063 351

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

contents

This pack contains

- An introduction which explains FEU's principles and guidelines for core skills development.
- gives a brief outline of FEU's Core Skills Post-16 project which was carried out during 1990-2 with 12 colleges
- an update of current national core skills developments.
- A glossary of core skills-related terminology, along with the organisation or initiative with which each is currently associated. The table first appeared in FEU's *Core Skills in Action* and has been updated.
- Five sets of guidelines each of which corresponds to a core skills development area:
  1. Institutional management
  2. Planning and developing the curriculum
  3. Learner participation and action-planning
  4. Learning opportunities
  5. Assessing, recording and reviewing achievement

  Each booklet contains:
  - a list of principles and activities/criteria by which institutions, teams or individuals can judge their core skills development in that area;
  - examples of activities and quotations from the project colleges which illustrate these;
  - key findings and recommendations in each area arising from the project work.
- A set of action sheets which contain the lists of principles and suggested activities in all the five areas above. These can be completed by teams or individuals to plan or review their own progress in core skills development.

introduction

ISBN: 1 85338 293 0

Copyright Further Education Unit 1993

FEU registered charity number 326347

RP620

Reproduction in whole or in part of the contents of this publication is authorised for all non-commercial educational purposes, provided the source, i.e. FEU, is acknowledged. All rights reserved with regard to commercial reproduction of the contents.

Printed by Blackmore Press, Dorset

introduction

This pack has been created out of FEU's project work over two years with 12 colleges. It is based on our assumption that in order to guarantee the quality of learning programmes and improve levels of achievement, there are certain principles which should underpin all good learning programmes, academic or vocational, especially if they seek to foster and develop core skills.

FEU has devised a set of principles for core skills development, along with corresponding activities for teachers and learners. Course teams or individual teachers can use these to audit and review their curriculum offer, or for planning and development. Curriculum managers can use them as checklists for the institution's statement of entitlement or quality framework. The principles and activities have been tested by the colleges in the project within A-level and vocational programmes, and examples of their experiences are provided.

It is FEU's view, based on its fieldwork, that core skills development should not be solely the responsibility of individual teachers; nor is it only related to teaching and learning strategies. Core skills development can and does happen in comparative isolation but to be fully effective and consistent for all learners, there needs to be a whole range of related activities and processes developed alongside. The other major requirement which emerged from the project is the need for the active support of senior management in deploying and co-ordinating resources.

We have identified five areas of activity for effective core skills development which should be seen as interconnected and part of an integrated system of curriculum development. The whole provides an ideal model for core skills development but is divided into separate sections, each sub-divided into activities. The sections can be used separately or together and do not have to be used in any particular order, although there is a logical progression in the way they are presented. Thus, development can be targeted, and achievable goals provided for any sector/department of an institution, whatever stage of core skills development it is at.

The five areas are given below with a statement which summarises the principles and activities:

1. **Institutional management**
   should support core skills development by the implementation of an overall college strategy, and the deployment and co-ordination of resources which encourage the development of areas 2-5 below.
2. **Planning and developing the curriculum**
   should be done by teams who teach on the course or programme in order to agree on a core skills framework and jointly develop teaching/learning/recording/assessment procedures.
3. **Learner participation and action planning**
   should involve students in understanding exactly what core skills are, how they will be taught/learned/recorded/assessed in their course or learning programme, and link previous core skills experience to future targets for progress and achievement.

4. **Learning opportunities**
for core skills should be provided through a range of teaching and learning strategies and a variety of environments which facilitate core skills development.

5. **Assessing, recording and reviewing achievement**
should involve the provision of a regular structured time when core skills achievement is recognised, reviewed and assessed by both teacher and learner, using a record of achievement and performance criteria which are understood by both.

How did FEU's principle and criteria for core skills development originate ?

They originated partly through considering best practice arising from recent changes in curriculum development, teaching, learning and assessment and also took account of principles of good practice as recognised by other national bodies with experience and expertise in this area.

The development of core skills and of FEU's principles and criteria for their development are based on a desire to improve the quality of learning programmes largely through the increasing involvement and informing of learners, and emphasis on the process of learning rather than only on teaching.

It might be helpful to outline the changes involved in a more learner-centred curriculum especially for teachers, managers, and the institution as a whole. **Over the page is a simple descriptive model which gives the two extremes of teacher- and learner-centred practice which highlights and illustrates the changes. They should be seen as each end of a continuum with most teachers somewhere between the two.**

The major changes involve the use of teachers' time in more team work and the use of different skills compared with those they may have been using or trained to use. This arises from the greater emphasis on the learner's experience, the need for greater clarity about what they are expected to learn and the criteria for success, and on the provision of opportunities to record and reflect on that learning. The principles and criteria in this pack reflect these changes and provide strategies for individuals, teams or institutions to address and implement these changes incrementally.

	Teacher centred	Learner centred
	Teachers are subject specialists who impart knowledge and information and whose 'class contact time' is spent in a classroom, teaching their own subject to a whole group of students. This practice is characterised by the separateness of the subject matter, the individuality of the teacher and the collective nature of students.	There is greater integration and cohesion of subjects especially within vocational areas. Individual subjects are often combined under a topic or theme related to 'real-life' situations so that connections are made between subjects, and to show how the subjects are applied. This practice is characterised by increasing collaboration and co-operation between teachers, and the increasing recognition of the individual learning needs of students.
Curriculum planning and development	Individual teachers spend most of their time preparing their own particular subject-specific lessons, and this preparation, although some of it is done in advance, continues throughout an academic year.	Less time is spent by teachers in individual lesson preparation throughout the year, and more spent in the collaborative process of designing, planning and writing cross-curricular assignments and resource-based learning packages of which their own specialist subject is only a part. This usually has to be done with other subject specialist staff teaching on the same course, well in advance, often before the course begins
Learning opportunities	A teacher's time is spent largely in the classroom, or workshop if they teach a technical subject, in intensive exposition and explanation of their own subject, using the notes, texts, practical activities which they personally have prepared for a whole group of students.	More time is spent in helping students as individuals to use ready-prepared materials and assignments, either in the classroom or in learning centres to which students have access. Students spend some time using supported self-study materials.
Assessment and recording of achievement	Teachers spend time on marking the work they have set, but the amount and frequency are not prescribed and they alone are responsible for their students' progression and performance in that particular subject. Performance is ultimately measured by a final examination, in which the criteria for success are not made explicit, either to the teacher or the student. Progress is recorded as the individual teacher or institution requires, and external formal structured reports requiring marks and comments are required only once or twice a year. Students receive a certificate from an examination board which shows the subject and grade of pass.	Coursework assignments may have different functions in that some may be used to help students to learn and put into practice certain skills and knowledge, whilst others may be used to assess a student's performance and the results will be accredited towards a final qualification. The performance or behaviour expected of students is often externally prescribed, and will include the demonstration of skills and behaviour as well as the recall of content and knowledge. The criteria by which the course work must be marked are usually externally devised and need to be made explicit to students. Consequently, all teachers have to spend more time with colleagues ensuring that they understand these criteria and use them in a consistent way, because students' progress depends on a collaborative effort from all staff on their course. Teachers have to spend much more time in their teams jointly marking, or agreeing marks, for the assignments. They have to find time to complete records of achievement devised for use either by the course team, the college as a whole, or devised regionally or nationally. Students receive a record of achievement which shows details of outcomes of behaviour or performance achieved by the student as well as the qualification.

National update — vocational qualifications

Current national developments in core skills are rather different from those envisaged after FEU's Core Skills Post-16 project began in September 1990.

Then, hopes were high, that after government support for core skills, they could be developed and assessed in both A levels and vocational qualifications. It was felt that this would help to encourage, and give greater value to, curriculum breadth in both types of qualifications. The National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ), Schools Examination and Assessment Council (SEAC), NCC and FEU were involved in the development work and for the first time, national definitions were produced for communication, numeracy, problem-solving, personal skills, information technology and a modern language (the six core skills originally outlined by the NCC working group in March 1990).

NCVQ and SEAC reported to the Secretary of State for Education as requested in 1991, and the former has now invested considerable resources in the development of core skills. This development is currently culminating in the inclusion and accreditation of core skills in NCVQ's new qualification framework — the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) — which is being introduced in some centres from September 1992.

The core skills of communication, application of number and information technology will be developed and assessed as part of each GNVQ at levels 2 and 3. The core skills specifications are expressed in the form of elements, performance criteria and range statements. Further work was requested of NCVQ by the Secretary of State on the core skills of problem-solving and personal skills; NCVQ has further classified personal skills as working with others and improving own learning and performance, and has produced specifications for these and problem-solving. The development work continues with a view to their eventual inclusion in the GNVQs. The inclusion of core skills in National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) is expected to begin a phased introduction after all Lead Bodies have reported in December 1992.

So, the main formal vehicles at the moment for core skills development are BTEC qualifications and GNVQ, but each of these has a different set of core skills specifications in terms of definitions, levels and criteria for assessment. Obviously this is difficult for teachers who might now have to change from one to the other or use both. Experience with BTEC will help those now doing GNVQs, but the development of a completely different set of core skills and criteria for assessment will add once again to the confusion surrounding this area of work.

National update — A-level qualifications

It is often assumed, both within and without the educational system, that achievement at A level automatically confers on learners proficiency in, for example, communication, problem-solving, and personal skills such as managing their own time or working with others. However, the acquisition of these skills is not formally assessed at A level and although many good teachers will give learners an opportunity to develop and practice those skills, there is no guarantee of this happening unless the skills are recorded, and preferably accredited, as part of all A-level qualifications.

SEAC's 1991 report to the Secretary of State on core skills in A-level qualifications was never made public, but it did indicate that at least some of the NCC core skills could be incorporated into existing A-level syllabuses. It was not felt possible, however, to assess them within the existing A-level assessment framework. To date, no further development work has taken place and once again, the situation has arisen where the vocational qualifications are the ones embracing core skills and A levels remain unchanged. In fact some opportunities for core skills development may be diminished with the maximum coursework assessment now set at 20%.

Nevertheless, FEU has growing evidence, from its contact with A-level lecturers in all types of post-16 institutions, of a desire to see changes in A levels and to include the core skills for various reasons:

- a desire to complete Universities Central Council on Admissions (UCCA)/ Polytechnic Centralised Admission Systems (PCAS) forms effectively and offer learners the opportunity to improve their performance in the areas required for entry to higher education (HE);
- interest in improving learning and involving students in the process of learning effectively at A level and in HE;
- increasing involvement of A-level teachers on BTEC courses which involve developing learner-centred approaches and including common skills;
- the recording and reviewing of achievement of core skills to provide a focus for tutorial periods;
- increasing interest of HE institutions in core skills through records of achievement, Enterprise in HE, competence-based degrees and work-based learning;
- increasing demands from employers and employer's organisations for education which develops the sort of skills required to meet the needs of industry at all levels e.g. Engineering Council, the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), Liverpool University's study of employers' attitudes.

We have found that to these ends, many A-level teachers in FE, sixth-form and tertiary colleges are changing their teaching and learning strategies to encourage core-skills development, introducing recording of achievement in core skills and changing to an A-level syllabus which allow for greater core skills-related work.

What did the colleges do in the project?

Some colleges used FEU's principles and activities to assist their BTEC and vocational development work, especially with part-time students; others used them to develop core skills in programmes such as A level and GCSE where none already existed as part of the certification and accreditation framework; others used them as a framework for cross-college core skills initiatives. They used the activities outlined in the action sheets, modified and added to them and provided examples from their experience of strategies which had been useful.

Which core skills were the colleges using?

The project was about general principles of core skills development rather than about specific core skills. However, it was suggested that colleges use core skills which corresponded as closely as possible to the six core skills specified in the National Curriculum Council's (NCC) publication *Core Skills 16-19*, and on which subsequent development work focused.

These are:

Communication	Numeracy
Problem-solving	Information technology
Personal skills	Modern languages

The project began before the development of national core skills definitions and specifications in response to the then Secretary of State's request in November 1990. The colleges in the project therefore used existing definitions such as those for BTEC, Certificate of Pre-Vocational Education (CPVE) and Youth Training (YT). In some cases they developed their own because they found that the nationally defined core skills did not cover all the areas they wanted to include such as analytical skills. There was nevertheless a strong desire to see one single minimum set of national core skills specifications rather than the current variety. We have used the term core skills throughout, whatever the colleges were using.

Were the core skills being integrated by colleges?

Where possible without distortion of the qualification, each college integrated the core skills into the curriculum of at least two different courses or learning programmes. This often happened after initial bolt-on provision had proved unsatisfactory. Integration appeared to be more challenging for A-level teachers who were less used to using the variety of teaching and learning strategies or contexts which facilitate core skills development.

There was also variation between the different core skills:

communication, problem solving and personal skills — almost everyone found that it was possible to integrate some elements of those whatever their subject;

numeracy and information technology — these proved more difficult to integrate for some teachers and in some subject areas especially in A levels. Both of these core skills involve the need for staff development or for more use of specialist staff to provide ideas and support. Separate provision of IT and numeracy through open access provision varied in its success with teachers and learners;

modern languages — provision has mostly been through additional or bolt-on studies, often on a voluntary basis, but open access provision, if carefully managed seems to be a workable option. Use of the BTEC European Studies Unit or qualifications such as Foreign Languages in Commerce (FLIC) and Foreign Language at Work (FLAW) offered by the London Chamber of Commerce (LCC) have proved helpful in providing a structure for the work and an opportunity for achievement to be accredited towards a qualification. A lack of trained staff is an issue here, and the provision of open learning packages with staff available at set times is one option; one college made use of its adult education language lecturers in its mainstream provision.

Staffing the project

Project director and author	Sue Rawlinson	
FEU Regional Development Officers who managed the project in the colleges	London and the South East	Rosemary Moorse
	Northern Region	Maria Hughes
	West Midlands	Gaby Braun
	Yorkshire and Humberside	Debbie Thornton
Steering committee	Brenda Hatton	London Education Business Partnership
	Stuart McCoy	Barrow College
	Eric McFarlane	University of Surrey
	Beryl Pratley	Her Majesty's Inspectorate
	Paul Spencer	Training Enterprise Education Directorate of the Employment Department
Consultant on the final publication	John Pursaill	

Other FEU work related to core skills is ongoing, and new work in being developed or underway. FEU is interested to hear from those who are involved in core skills-related activity, especially in any of the following areas:

- dissemination of the Core Skills Action Pack in the the regions;
- core skills and engineering;
- IT as a core skill;
- core skills and adults;
- core themes;
- the value added by core skills;
- core skills in GNVQs.

Contact: Sue Rawlinson
Further Education Unit
Citadel Place
Tinworth Street
London SE11 5EH

Tel: 071-962 1280
Fax: 071-962 1266

Project colleges and courses

College name	Project co-ordinator	Course details
Richmond upon Thames	Jean Manuel Francis Moore	A-level Geography BTEC National Diploma in Health Studies
Walsall	Elke Worrow Dave Elphee	BTEC 1st Diploma in Business/Finance Hairdressing City and Guilds
Newcastle	Ann Wills	1st year A-level tutorial group (various subjects) Cross-college modern foreign language initiative
Peterlee	John Smalley	A-level Maths and Science subjects
Milton Keynes	Sally Dicketts Jane Morgan	A-level English, Communications, Economics BTEC National Diploma in Leisure Studies
Grimsby	Paul Smith	A-level Psychology, English, Physics
Kingsway		A levels in foreign languages BTEC 1st Certificate in Design BTEC National Diploma /Certificate in Computer Studies
Calderdale	Andy Stamford	Integrated Year (GCSE) Adult Access
Darlington	John Davies	BTEC National Diploma in Computer Studies YT Family/Community Care (C&G)
Dudley	Fred Weston	A-level Science BTEC National in Science
Hull	Tony Wood	BTEC National Diploma in Business/Finance BTEC National Diploma in Engineering
Newham	Chris Garnett	A-level Psychology, Sociology, English BTEC 1st Diploma in Engineering

1

Institutional management

- principles and activities
- examples from colleges
- key findings and recommendations

Principle

that college senior management facilitate, encourage and value core skills development by their inclusion in college policies, strategies and quality management processes

A set of blank action sheets containing a list of the activities below for planning or reviewing core skills development is included in this pack. The examples from colleges involved in the project illustrate the activities below.

Activities

a **providing an institutional policy and strategy for core skills development:**

1 a college policy on core skills covers all curriculum areas and all learners

2 a whole-college core-skills operational plan showing action to be taken, when and by whom

3 audits of existing core skills work and staff expertise are conducted

4 core skills development is co-ordinated with other college and national initiatives e.g. GNVQ, National Record of Achievement (NRA), BTEC, Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI)

b **supporting core skills development by deployment of staff and resources:**

1 a manager or group is designated as responsible for overall core skills development

2 awareness-raising/staff development on core skills issues is provided, either separately or as part of other initiatives

3 existing staff expertise and experience is used to aid development work with less experienced staff

4 teams develop core skills work within and across curriculum/subject areas

5 timetables allow for meeting times for staff

6 review/tutorial periods are provided for all learners

7 a range of resources/learning environments is available for all learners

8 action-planning/records of achievement/tutorials/review periods are part of a single coherent system, understood by teachers and learners

9 core skills implementation and achievement are evaluated as elements of course review and/or quality management

Examples of activities

providing support through policies, strategies and resource deployment

Example 1 In one college initiative strong senior management support and involvement was seen as crucial from the start. The project leader when reviewing progress two years later felt this was a critical factor in the success achieved. The senior management team steered developments throughout. Its first step was to set up a core skills development group (three principal lecturers) and to authorise them to carry out an audit of core skills across the college to identify development needs and good practice. This was done early in 1990 and all course leaders were interviewed. Main points of subsequent action were:

- an awareness raising event for curriculum directors and staff (March 1990);
- SMT met curriculum directors and team leaders to address planning for core skills development (May 1990);
- residential sessions to develop cross-college core skill teams (June–December 1990);
- selected course teams piloted core skills strategies (September 1990–May 1992);
- SMT agreed policy for core skills assessment at entry and exit in all courses (January 1992);
- curriculum directors and then course teams met to agree approach to specifying core skills and criteria (Feb–March 1992);
- specifications produced summer 1992, to be implemented 1992–3;
- core skills linked with college NVQ, GNVQ, action planning initiatives.

Example 2 A college core skills initiative began with a whole college staff development session, led by the deputy director, in which teams present analysed core skills essential to their subject areas. One BTEC and two A-level teams were then identified to implement agreed strategies, a college core-skills co-ordinator was appointed to facilitate progress, and the LEA Advisor for Post-16 Education was invited to participate in the A-level team meetings. A meetings schedule was established by which the A-level team met weekly or fortnightly, BTEC monthly, and a cross-college core-skills group twice a term. The following tasks were agreed for the pilot teams:

- define core skills and identify a hierarchy where appropriate;
- analyse current curriculum delivery and establish where core skills are present and which ones;
- identify where skills can be made explicit in course delivery (A level);
- clarify assessment criteria and make explicit to students (A level);
- make assessment user friendly to students (BTEC);
- emphasise core skills in induction phase (BTEC).

Example 3 One college's BTEC and A-level curriculum groups are both resourced for curriculum co-ordination and meet weekly. They jointly developed a draft core skills log-book for general college use, and working groups were set up to adapt the draft for BTEC and A-level students respectively. A one-day INSET workshop for course tutors then refined both versions to match student needs more closely and to harmonise them with NRA requirements. Further refinements were carried out by individual BTEC and A-level teams.

Example 4 In an FE college, at a curriculum development event for all college managers in 1989 it was decided to 'capture resources first for core skills and an entitlement curriculum'. Work was set in motion to establish learning centres which could provide support on core skills — two were ready by September 1990. Some funding was provided by a TEED project to develop core competences for all NVQ programmes; other activity on core skills was linked with projects and funding derived from installing management information systems, TVEI/ROA development, INSET provision and other initiatives. This made it possible to fund remission and other resources for a range of core skills development activities by team leaders and their staff.

Example 5 After staff development sessions on teaching and learning strategies and on working with adults, an HE access team decided to move away from its then traditional teacher-centred delivery methods. Part of this process was the reduction of all timetabled sessions by half an hour to two hours. The extra time was used to increase the number of individual tutorials, and to allow for both timetabled and voluntary attendance at core skills workshops.

Example 6 Some colleges are using quality assurance systems as a means to promote core skills development. Their developments include the following:

- a quality manual indicating issues which must be addressed in course review and evaluation, and which includes core skills development;
- annual course review reports and action plans by course teams, based on the manual and considered by quality staff (and perhaps a quality committee);
- advice and support from quality staff who help to agree priorities for development with course teams;
- guidance on the constitution of course/programme teams, e.g. they should include members from across courses or departments, students, etc.;
- cross-college activities by quality staff or others outside the course team e.g. core skills audit, review of teaching/learning strategies, student consultation on issues such as core skills;
- using FEU's core skills quality criteria to evaluate college developments.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Principle

that college senior management facilitate, encourage and value core skills development by its inclusion in college policies, strategies and quality management processes

Key findings and recommendations

a **providing an institutional policy and strategy for core skills development**

- for fully effective development there needs to be whole-college core-skills policy which is a clear part of the college's mission statement or business plan;
- a strategy and operational plan should be devised for putting the policy into practice; whilst allowing for autonomy and development at team and individual level, senior management need to lead and co-ordinate many elements for effective implementation, so the strategy should address:
  - * the stages and time-scale of development, and staff responsibilities;
  - * core skills for all types of learners e.g. academic, vocational, part-time, full-time, adults, employed and unemployed;
  - * how far core skills will be integrated into programmes and qualifications or will be additional to them;
  - * auditing of core skills in existing provision and of staff expertise and experience;
  - * methods of delivering core skills and systems for assessing and recording achievement;
  - * resources and staff development for core-skills-related activities;
  - * the role of core skills in the overall quality management system of the institution;
- curriculum managers have an important role in making the connections between core skills and other initiatives such as (G)NVQs, TVEI, NRA, BTEC; the strategy should aim to overcome inconsistency in core skills implementation, and avoid fragmentation and confusion;
- there need to be mechanisms by which the core skills practitioners feed back experience and suggestions to senior management and the college strategy and policy.

b **supporting core skills development by deployment of staff and resources**

- was considered by all colleges in the project to be the key to effective and consistent core skills implementation; allocation of time and resources helps to overcome resistance in staff and students. Responsibility for developments should be shared between managers and teachers;
- whilst colleges felt that it was important for an individual member or group of senior staff in a college to have responsibility for core skills development, there is a danger that the development will be seen as too separate an initiative instead of part of the whole learning process;
- senior managers can encourage core skills development by realising the increasing importance of the team in the curriculum development and implementation process; there should be opportunities for teamwork across subjects/departments/vocational areas;
- senior managers can facilitate development by supporting and encouraging the use of a range of teaching and learning strategies and different learning environments; the provision of time and facilities for tutorial/recording of progress needs to be addressed as an institutional issue with best practice becoming the norm;
- it should not be assumed that any teachers, even those with experience of BTEC, fully understand or can deliver core (common) skills consistently; a staff development policy must embrace core skills issues, take account of all staff needs, and can be linked to the sort of national developments mentioned earlier;
- although extra funding and resources are welcome for core skills development, quite significant improvements can be made with only small amounts of money; colleges in the project only received £2000 over one year and did quite a lot of earlier development work without funding. Much of the achievement in colleges is about the way in which existing resources and staff are deployed to support core skills. Time was the most important resource which staff said they needed — both for their teamwork and curriculum planning and for ensuring effective learning — and senior managers can be instrumental in creating this;
- there is a greater need for college managers to recognise where the changes are occurring in all teaching and learning processes, and fund the sort of team-building and ongoing team activities which are required not only for core skills but for any good quality curriculum development and implementation.

2

Planning and developing the curriculum

- principles and activities
- examples from colleges
- key findings and recommendations

Principle

that core skills are developed in the curriculum through the activities of teaching teams and a framework for core skills is agreed and understood by all team members

A set of blank action sheets containing a list of the activities below for planning or reviewing core skills development is included in this pack. The examples from colleges involved in the project illustrate the activities below.

Activities

a **using team meetings for core skills development**

1 all course or subject programme team members meet regularly even if not everyone is able to attend every meeting

2 the definitions of core skills being used are understood by everyone in the team

3 teaching/learning strategies and resources needed to develop competence in core skills are planned by the whole team

4 work experience or community projects are planned by the team as a vehicle for core skills development/experience

5 assessment and recording procedures for all core skills achievements are planned and understood by the whole team

b **carrying out an audit of existing core skills provision**

1 an audit of where core skills already exist in syllabuses and/or whole programmes is carried out by learners and teachers

2 precise definitions of core skills are used in carrying out the audit

3 audit results are used to plan core skills development

Examples of activities

using team meetings/audits of core skills provision

Example 1 A college business studies team has developed a system designed to ensure core skill development in all parts of the course:

- all course staff must produce a scheme of work for each learning block which shows core skills to be achieved in their own subject module(s), and methods for achieving this, including the use of work experience;
- the same is required for each assignment and the whole course team is briefed on, and discusses, each assignment before students start work on it;
- core skills staff carry out audits with work placement supervisors and feed information on core-skills learning and assessment into course team meetings;
- the knowledge that students have a prescription for core skills to be achieved (through each module) by the end of the block motivates teachers to provide the necessary varied learning opportunities;
- 'there are still some problems in some options with modules and/or teachers, but peer group and student pressure have led in practice to the vast majority of staff delivering teaching and learning strategies that support core skills development'.

Example 2 An FE college wishing to develop core skills in A-level programmes saw cohesive student groups as a key to their development:

- course teams were formed for groups of subjects (e.g. English, Psychology and Sociology) where full-time students worked in the same group for at least two of their three A-level subjects;
- teams included main subject teachers with tutors for IT, careers and subsidiary foreign languages;
- teams met monthly, 'unitised' parts of syllabuses to forge links between subjects, designed integrative assignments to develop core skills and reinforce unit links, and planned staff development days.

Results included:

- acceptance of the value of course teams — 'a new concept to A-level teachers in the college';
- a 'cultural shift' in the attitudes of A-level staff to core skills and teaching methods, recognising a need for changes starting from student needs;
- agreement that all tutors must have a detailed understanding of students' whole learning programmes;
- higher student motivation and stronger group identity.

Example 3 In one college, four leading science staff with experience of both BTEC and A levels formed a development group with the aim of coalescing both courses as far as possible, and sharing a common approach to core skills. It was found to be possible to construct a joint programme which covered about half of the requirements for A-level sciences and almost all BTEC pure science and laboratory work components, including the BTEC Common Skills. This led to a change of A-level Chemistry syllabus to one more suited to such an approach.

Example 4 Within one college department, groups of staff covering a wide range of A levels, reviewed and audited communication and problem-solving skills within their courses and discussed the value of the skills with students. Each student then completed a personal audit of development in these skills within her/his A-level courses and in extra-curricular activities. As a result of this it was concluded that A-level courses would be developed to enable core skills to become a central part of the curriculum, and the departmental management group revised the tutorial system to provide greater support to core skills across all A-level provision.

Example 5 A meeting of college staff and employers was held to discuss core skills and opportunities to develop these during work placements. It was followed by an audit of core skills in work experience, carried out by questionnaire for employers and students. This led to greater commitment to core skills from workplace supervisors, collaboration in core skills assessment, and enhanced student awareness of the competences being assessed.

Example 6 A variety of approaches to core skills audits was used by different teams, e.g:

- audit limited to specific skills, e.g. communication and problem solving;
- course audits of existing BTEC integrative assignments or particular units/modules, then extended to whole course;
- audits across similar A levels (e.g. Sciences) or across popular programmes of A levels;
- audits by staff teams of their own subject area;
- student audits of subjects or whole programmes of study;
- audits of work experience and extra-curricular activities;
- use of questionnaires, checklists and discussion, or a mixture of these.

Principle

that core skills are developed in the curriculum through the activities of teaching teams and a framework for core skills is agreed and understood by all team members

Key findings and recommendations

a **using team meetings for core skills development**

- core skills curriculum development was found to be most effective with teachers working in teams. These teams need not always have core skills as their main focus but will probably be concerned with all aspects of curriculum development such as designing the learning programme, writing assignments, devising and agreeing assessment and recording of achievement procedures, and core skills should be part of all these activities;
- the integration of core skills into the programme, the learning opportunities which will foster the skills, the resources and staff needed, and the assessment procedures, should be planned in advance and in detail by the whole team;
- not all core skills will be integrated into every part of the curriculum; some planning of 'bolt-on', separate core skills activity may be a useful starting point, or remain useful, e.g. foreign language skills, IT, or study skills. But most teachers and learners in the project found that they preferred core skills to be an integral part of their main subject areas;
- it should not be assumed that all team members or even team leaders understand core skills definitions and assessment criteria; meetings should improve and check everyone's understanding so that there is consistency. There is a difference between defining for assessment and defining for shared understanding and development, the former requiring more detail (and complexity of language);
- core skills definitions as provided by examining and validation bodies are not necessarily best suited to student learning needs or student and employer understanding — translation/simplification may be required by the team;
- meetings can be very effective if they mix staff membership e.g. A-level Humanities or Science teachers together; BTEC and A-level teachers; mixed BTEC vocational areas together. This exchanges ideas and builds confidence in less experienced staff and also can be useful for joint development work across subject/vocational areas;
- teams at different stages of development have different priorities, and activities may vary accordingly, examples could include:
  - * A level and GCSE — developing team-based approaches, finding appropriate core-skill definitions, moving away from bolt-on delivery, and using a wider range of teaching and learning strategies;
  - * some (but not all) BTEC, C&G CPVE — assessment, levels of competence, progression, and integrated delivery.

b **carrying out an audit of existing core skills provision**

- can be done as a college-initiated activity but within that, colleges found that teams or courses preferred some autonomy over the way they operated, especially using audits with learners;
- should help everyone to identify where they think core skills are being developed in their own curriculum area and show up gaps in provision;
- motivates staff by making explicit what core skills work is already being done and providing a structure for further development;
- can also be carried out by learners to raise their awareness, to begin dialogue about core skills and compare their perceptions with those of teachers;
- needs to use precise definitions of core skills, but should be used as an aid to development rather than be too detailed and complex an end in itself; colleges found the process of the audit particularly valuable, especially in improving both staff/staff and staff/student relationships.

3

Learner participation and action planning

- principles and activities
- examples from colleges
- key findings and recommendations

Principle

that learners are encouraged to understand and value core skills by the acknowledgment of previous achievement and relating of the skills to current and future learning needs

A set of blank action sheets containing a list of the activities below for planning or reviewing core skills development is included in this pack. The examples from colleges involved in the project illustrate the activities below.

Activities

a **improving learners' understanding of core skills**

1 learners' previous achievement in core skills is acknowledged, e.g. through the National Record of Achievement

2 the induction programme is used to introduce core skills to learners in a simple, comprehensible way

3 individual action plans or learning agreements show core skills targets, teaching and learning strategies and resources

4 methods by which core skills will be taught and/or learned are discussed with learners

5 criteria by which learners' performance in core skills will be assessed and recorded are explained to them

6 the action plan is combined with a continuous system for recording achievement

b **encouraging learners' valuing of core skills**

1 the value of core skills in the whole college programme is discussed with learners

2 learners identify where they learn/develop/use core skills

3 the requirements of HE and employers in relation to core skills are discussed with learners

4 UCCA/PCAS forms are considered for potential development and recording of achievement in core skills

5 employers' requirements are ascertained through questionnaires, checklists, advertisements, etc.

Examples of activities

Improving learners' understanding and valuing of core skills

Example 1 One college has linked core skills action-planning and recording of achievement on full-time courses using a college-wide framework which entails:

- core skills 'entry lists' for diagnostic assessment and action-planning which take the National Curriculum as a base;
- core skill induction modules used as appropriate to the individual student's diagnosed entry level (modules designed for school leavers are currently being trialled);
- 'exit lists' which define core skill levels to be achieved by students at completion of their courses — these will in due course be linked with NCVQ core skill unit levels;
- cross-college core skill modules to bridge the gap between 'entry' and 'exit' levels — these are assessment modules and their delivery should be embedded within courses and individual learning programmes.

Example 2 A BTEC Engineering team has produced a core skills starter pack for use in student induction. It includes a guide to BTEC Common Skills but 'needs to be reworded in punchy student language', and an action plan which recognises extra-curricular activities — 'the team are very much aware that students develop core skills across a wide range of activities not bounded by college life'. They feel that the introduction of action planning has itself encouraged the modification of teaching and learning strategies to develop core skills and to suit individual learner needs.

Example 3 Science A-level students in a tertiary college took part in discussions to develop action planning, learning agreements and logbooks. This made it much easier for personal tutors to focus on individual targets for action in termly review tutorials. Core skills played a major role for two reasons: a staff/student audit across subjects had clarified core skills definitions; and the local (then) polytechnic supported core skills development in a degree franchise arrangement with the college.

Example 4 Staff and students on a day-release BTEC Construction course drew up a list of occupational skills and a list of common skills from the BTEC programme, written in jargon-free language. They presented this to their employers who were asked to rank the skills in order of importance for the day-release students in their current jobs. In all cases, the employers ranked some of the core skills such as 'working as a member of a team' or 'communicating effectively', more highly than many of the specific technical and vocational skills. Students, college staff and the employers have subsequently been more convinced of the value of the inclusion and assessment of the common (core) skills in the college programme.

Example 5 During their induction week YT Caring trainees who are part of an FE college YT programme agree and sign training contracts and develop action plans. Core skills targets are then agreed after discussion with tutor, work placement officer and workplace supervisor. Feedback on these targets is provided through trainees' diaries, work placement visits, college assignments and regular tutorials.

Example 6 A group of A-level tutors in an FE college have developed a career development package for A-level students which involves:

- learning modules that cover job studies, personal and other skills;
- a self-assessment module in which the student assesses and targets her/his core skills against requirements for a desired job or career;
- links with action planning during and after induction;
- a core skills diary in which students record core skill activity across their whole curriculum.

Subject teachers are now increasingly faced with questions on core skills in their A-level classes.

Example 7 UCCA and PCAS forms and references for entry to HE require the recording of teachers' impressions of students' ability in a range of areas such as 'powers of expression, communication (oral and written); personal relationships; powers of analysis', most of which are very similar to, or elements of, other core skills.

In some colleges, teachers on A level, Access to HE and BTEC courses use records of their students' achievement in core skills as a basis for the completion of UCCA and PCAS forms, references and interview preparation.

The development and recording of core skills within their programmes allow students to improve their skills in these areas and teachers to have some specific evidence of achievement on which to base their comments.

Principle

that learners are encouraged to understand and value core skills by the acknowledgement of previous achievement and relating of the skills to current and future learning needs

Key findings and recommendations

a **improving learners' understanding of core skills**

- the theme of actively involving learners in core skills development should run through all processes connected with core skills, but was found to be particularly effective if done as early as possible; it was this learner involvement which all colleges felt was one of the most important elements for success;
- all project colleges found that it is more beneficial if core skills are discussed using learners' own language, ideas and examples rather than jargon or educational language except where definitions, criteria, etc. must be used for examining and validating bodies;
- previous core skills achievement should be acknowledged, e.g. through records of achievement, although these are likely to vary greatly depending on pre-entry experience. Structured discussion, self-assessment, diagnostic assignments can also highlight previous experience or achievement;
- an action plan or learning agreement can show learners which core skills will be learned, and what sort of teaching/learning methods and resources will be used; it can also show a level of achievement on entry so that progress/value added can be measured and recorded;
- diaries, log books, profiles, records of achievement can also be used to record needs or weak areas and so form the ongoing action plan, but these needs must then be addressed for the system to be valued;
- learners' understanding of core skills can never be taken for granted, so core skills definitions, criteria for assessment, and methods of recording achievement should be made clear and explicit early, and continue to be reiterated throughout the course/learning programme;
- the process of action-planning with learners is valuable in itself and a workable system which everyone can use is desirable, rather than a highly technically accurate one which may be too complex; teachers and learners both need practice to become confident and staff experienced in adult guidance, Employment Training or YT will be able to help others.

b **encouraging learners' valuing of core skills**

- more value is usually placed on core skills if they are assessed as part of a qualification, but even then they are often not highlighted or seen as valued by teachers; if they are to be seen as 'core' or 'common', then their transferable nature should be thought through by teachers and made clear to learners;
- it can be shown how core skills can be the vehicle for learning in other parts of the programme, learning in general, and other areas of life; this is particularly helpful in A levels where core skills related to 'information-seeking' or 'study skills', can be the basis for a dialogue with learners about learning and provide motivation for involvement;
- the importance and relevance of the skills to employment is often reported at national level, but can be made more relevant by involving work experience providers, TEC staff, careers service, in discussion/questionnaires about employment needs — skills, attributes, references required — as long as the language used is appropriate;
- the relevance of core skills to HE can be related to the provision of opportunities for learners to practise and display achievement in the areas required by the UCCA/PCAS form, to references in general, or to the sort of skills they will need to be effective in HE; Access students are accepted because they have developed these skills, but A-level students will not necessarily have the same skills, as these are not required or assessed as part of A levels.

4

Learning opportunities

- principles and activities
- examples from colleges
- key findings and recommendations

Principle

that learners are provided with opportunities to develop core skills in a range of learning situations and helped to improve their performance

A set of blank action sheets containing a list of the activities below for planning or reviewing core skills development is included in this pack. The examples from colleges involved in the project illustrate the activities below.

Activities

a **using a range of teaching and learning strategies**

1 learner-centred activity is designed and delivered as part of the whole programme

2 a range of opportunities is used for learners to develop core skills, e.g. work-based assignments, group work, simulations, lectures, supported self-study, practical activities

3 opportunities are provided for learners to develop process skills, e.g. 'managing time', 'working with others', as well as written outcomes

4 learners are given help and support in using the different types of learning in 1 and 3 above

5 before each assignment both teachers and learners understand and agree on the skills, knowledge and outcomes expected of learners

b **using a variety of learning environments**

1 a range of learning environments is used to develop core skills e.g. work experience, workshops, open access areas, laboratories, classrooms

2 teachers/lecturers provide appropriate and adequate learning support in all environments

3 both learners and teachers are trained to use different learning environments effectively

Examples of activities

using a range of teaching and learning strategies and environments

Example 1 A group of BTEC and A-level staff in one college produced sample assignments as a guide for other teachers on both types of courses. The purpose is to illustrate the use of assignments for core skills development and to ensure a framework within which students are well briefed on activities and assessment. Each assignment provides for a written tutor review of its use and effectiveness, and for a student pack which contains the following:

- assignment brief;
- task sheet;
- specification of the core skills to be assessed;
- criteria for assessment of core skills;
- knowledge to be acquired and assessment criteria;
- description of methods to be used in organising and carrying out the assignment;
- self-assessment sheets;
- tutor-assessment sheets;
- explanation of tutor roles (e.g. subject and core skills tutors) in reviewing and assessing core skills achieved in the assignment;
- form for student's appraisal of the assignment.

Example 2 A BTEC Engineering team has extended teaching and learning strategies for integrative assignments and some course units to include role play, group activity, presentations, investigative activities and opportunities for both technical and artistic creativity. 'Group assignment work has resulted in student-directed peer assessment — students have generated their own records which include a "total effort" and an attendance record. Minutes of project group meetings are submitted for assessment purposes. It is emphasised that these developments were not directed by staff.'

Example 3 Economics and English A-level teachers agreed to adopt in parallel a new approach for certain parts of their first year courses. The aim was to promote student skills in problem solving, learning from, and working with, peers, learning from a variety of sources, and achieving goals by deadlines. Methods included:

- initial briefing of students on the task and on the skills they would develop;
- presentation of a problem using written and visual material, including videos;
- work in pairs, e.g. to clarify problems, agree information required, and obtain it from sources which might be outside college;
- small group work where solutions might be developed and presentations be prepared;
- oral and/or visual presentations by groups or individuals;

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

- usually a written report by each student, covering methods used as well as comments on solutions;
- continuing tutor support to groups, and review of the activity and of core skills development.

Example 4 Within a tertiary college a very successful video film of the college orchestra in action was made by the A-level Music group. This was an exciting project as it provided scope for identification of a large number of core skills. Both staff and students benefited from the exercise and the potential for assessing and recording core skills is enormous. Working out in advance which core skills the assignment will develop and assess is vital in a project of this complexity. Thorough debriefing/tutorial sessions demonstrate, through discussion and recording of the full range of skills that have been covered, the value of the work to staff and students.

Example 5 One college has a number of learning centres on its various sites which offer a range of learning materials including core skill units and study packages at various levels, with staff who can provide support and advice on these. Many course teams, academic and vocational, timetable their students for learning centre sessions on core skills. Individual students are also referred to the centres by arrangement with centre staff, may be recommended by their tutors to use particular material that is available there, or may seek help and advice on an entirely voluntary basis.

Example 6 Another college decided to introduce European Studies and foreign languages for all full-time students and as many part-time as possible. An open access area has been set up with learning packages and materials which students can use individually or in groups. Specialist staff are available at specified times during the week to provide support.

Example 7 As well as using a range of teaching and learning strategies - assignments, case studies, group work, presentations - colleges provided examples of other types of learning opportunities which they use to develop core skills:

- work-shadowing/work placement;
- work-related assignments;
- realistic work environments at college;
- finding own work placements;
- job-search activities;
- conducting interviews/questionnaires in college or community;
- making video/audio tapes;
- providing facilities/services for the community;
- visits — short visits/residentials/foreign exchanges arranged wholly or partially with student involvement.

Many of the above may only be offered once or twice in the students' whole programme, but full advantage should be taken of the opportunity for students and staff to be aware of the potential in these activities for the development, assessment and recording of core skills.

Principle

that learners are provided with opportunities to develop core skills in a range of learning situations and helped to improve their performance

Key findings and recommendations

a **using a range of teaching and learning strategies**

- should be planned in advance by any curriculum development team as part of the designing of appropriate assignments or materials for the whole programme; the type of learning opportunities offered should not be wholly dependent on the whim or preference of individual teachers;
- core skills development is best provided for through a variety of activities such as seminars, presentations, group work, supported self-study, practical work, which develop process skills such as 'spoken communication', 'working with others', as well as other skills and knowledge;
- core skills such as communication, problem-solving, personal skills and often IT, can be integrated into A-level curricula, without distorting the qualification, by teachers employing some of the methods above or making structured use of existing opportunities such as work-shadowing, visits, etc.;
- not all the methods need to be employed all teachers in every subject/module/assignment; advance planning by staff teams encourages a more cohesive, less fragmented approach;
- learners who were encouraged to develop core skills became more demanding about the sort of learning opportunities they felt they needed, but their motivation and interest also increased.

b **using a variety of learning environments**

- use of open access or drop-in learning areas can foster core skills such as 'IT' or 'managing one's own time' which would be more difficult to foster in a classroom;
- flexible or open learning is only one method of developing core skills; other activities planned around existing resources, e.g. library and/or learning centre, workshop and/or laboratory, the local environment or community, the workplace, should not waste the opportunity for the identification and recording of core skills achievement;
- there may be a need for further resource-based development within the college, and core skills development needs should also be taken into account when planning for this.

c **both the above**

- can lead to learners and teachers feeling unsure about their respective roles and responsibilities; learners need to become more active and involved in their learning, and teachers need to accept that sometimes learning can be taking place even if they themselves do not appear to be 'teaching' in a formal way;
- A-level teachers in particular seemed unwilling to allow learners to work without supervision in 'lesson time',wishing to control the process/ amount of input into a lesson rather than consider whether the learners' performance or outcome was achieved;
- most colleges found that learners needed help and practice in becoming less passive and more confident and effective using these methods. Although experience showed that they enjoyed being more involved in learning activities, unless that process was repeated across all their programme they were confused about what was expected of them;
- it was recognised that staff also need help; the provision of the different environments such as open access areas does not mean that staff know how to use them. Increased staff development is likely to be required on how to use the activities and environments to deliver the curriculum.

5

Assessing, reviewing and recording achievement

- principles and activities
- examples from colleges
- key findings and recommendations

Principle

that recording and reviewing of achievement, including core skills, is included in all programmes of study, and learners are helped to understand the criteria by which they are being assessed

A set of blank action sheets containing a list of the activities below for planning or reviewing core skills development is included in this pack. The examples from colleges involved in the project illustrate the activities below.

Activities

a **involving learners in the assessment/review process**

1 performance criteria for core skills assessment are made explicit to learners

2 a variety of evidence of achievement in core skills is used, e.g. oral work, observation of performance, written witness material, finished products, in addition to written outcomes

3 the use of self, peer, and group assessment is encouraged

4 learners are helped to identify, and where possible transfer, core skills in other areas of learning

b **structuring a recording and reviewing time**

1 specified periods of time for regular recording/reviewing of all achievement including core skills are built into the overall programme

2 review periods are structured around reviewing/ recording of progress, e.g. through coursework and assignments

c **developing an integrated system of recording/reviewing progress**

1 the recording/review process is part of the whole system of action planning and college/national records of achievement

2 all teachers have some involvement in, and understanding of, the recording/reviewing process

3 progress and achievement information is fed back to other teachers for future action and progression

Examples of activities

involving learners in the assessment, review and recording of core skills

Example 1 A BTEC team found ways of assessing 'process skills' as well as final products or outcomes of an assignment. Staff observe, both subjectively (informally) and objectively (formally), the overall student performance throughout the course.

Several of the major integrative assignments involve students working in groups/teams. The effectiveness of team work is assessed using a range of evidence, e.g.:

- a video of the group's presentation, including their ability to handle questions from assembled peers;
- group documents such as minutes of meetings, diaries, logs, peer comments/assessments and individual contributions are also used as evidence for assessment

'Opportunities for collecting evidence previously wasted are now recognised, but there are still wasted opportunities at the workplace and outside the college. We have spent many hours trying to produce a simple but effective method of recording all key areas — we do not claim it is right...discussion goes on.'

Example 2 In an A-level Economics course the following are used for each assignment:

learning dialogue. This dialogue between teachers and learners has a variety of contexts: the last ten-15 minutes of a lesson; written feedback; a mid-term review interview. The dialogue is given focus by 'assessment' and 'descriptor' sheets developed by the team. These record discussion between tutor and student on both the product and the process relating to points/criteria noted on the assessment sheet, and conclude with a short-term learning objective which includes core skills. This provides a cumulative record of the student's learning progress and, though primarily for the subject tutor, contributes to mid-term reviews with the personal tutor.

assessment sheet. This provides for assessment criteria under three headings: (a) subject knowledge gain; (b) problem solving and analysis; (c) communication and coherence. The student enters points under these headings after discussion with the tutor, before the task is attempted; points may vary between students. On completing the task the student makes a self-assessment against these criteria in a first right-hand column, and the tutor then enters assessments in a second column. It is planned to develop this sheet to make core skills more explicit.

Example 3 A BTEC Computer Studies team successfully used a 'triangulation' method in which parallel self, peer and tutor (sometimes more than one) assessments are recorded and then compared. If all similar, this confirms the student's self-assessment skills; if different, the reasons for this are explored and assessment criteria and evidence requirements are clarified. After some experience of this process second-year students were given an experimental assignment to devise core skill criteria for first-year students.

Example 4 A-level English and Psychology students were asked to complete self-assessment grids on a point scale, for a range of skills in the areas of problem solving, communication, personal skills and working in groups. Students said they found the assessment easy and ratings largely (but not always) confirmed teacher observations. However, it was found that after practising skills in an assignment, self ratings often differed markedly from those given previously, out of context. It was agreed that more work was needed on core skills development than on the mechanics of recording them and to focus on areas where students scored low ratings. A small group of student volunteers was selected to continue ratings on various skills, discuss them with staff and take part in regular reviews — then to be used as an input into designing an overall system for recording core skills progress.

Example 5 A core skills tutor worked closely with the course co-ordinator and team members of a Hotel and Catering course, meeting the student group for one hour weekly to develop a means of assessment that highlighted core skills. This has involved core skills audits of course assignments, student logs, action planning and recording achievement, and the design of a record form for transfer to a computer-based student tracking system. The weekly hour was found insufficient and the tutor frequently met students for action planning outside formal hours. Both students and staff have responded positively but students still find it difficult to formulate realistic action plans, and means are being sought to increase the time for this.

Example 6 Using the tutorial/review process. Students in a tertiary college use an integrated system of action planning, recording, reviewing of learning linked by a student contract. All tutor groups are timetabled for two hours per week in which active work using a student log book fosters personal development and core skills. Every tutor has an additional hour for individual tutorial work where action planning occurs. Students initiate a termly review meeting with subject lecturers and convey documentation from this negotiated review of their progress to their tutor.

Principle

that recording and reviewing of achievement, including core skills, is included in all programmes of study and learners are helped to understand the criteria by which they are being assessed

Key findings and recommendations

a **involving learners in the assessment/ review process**

- although an ideal review period would be on a one-to-one basis between a learner and a personal tutor, other activities can include whole group work, with learners reviewing or assessing their own and/or their peers' achievement in pairs or groups;
- the assessment criteria for core skills should be made explicit to learners to help them to understand what they are supposed to achieve, even if as in A levels the assessment of core skills does not count towards a qualification;
- assessment of core skills achievement needs to take account of a variety of evidence, not just written outcomes; it should be made clear to learners before, during and after assignments or activities, whether a process and skills, such as 'working as a member of a team' or 'choosing different approaches to solving a problem', are being assessed, or only the final product/outcome.

b **structuring a time for recording and reviewing core skills achievement**

- need not involve a separate time slot only for core skills but, as part of a tutorial/progress review period, learners should be helped to recognise and separately record core skills achievement in addition to other skills and knowledge;
- additional separate time can be created, regularly or occasionally, by individual teachers or teams, using some of the 'taught course hours' for recording and/or reviewing learning; this needs acceptance from teachers, learners and possibly employers (for day-release students) that this sort of learning activity is as valuable as more formal 'teaching';
- colleges in the project, working independently, arrived at a general model for structuring learner-centred reviews which includes:
  - * looking at core skills across the whole learning experience, not just formal assignments or work experience, is necessary for the transferable nature of the core skills to be made clear;
  - * some evidence of achievement should be collected by learners but also includes activities carried out and assessed for assignments;
  - * assessment of evidence and progress should be discussed between teacher/learner, recorded on review sheets and further achievement targets set;
  - * if required for accreditation towards a qualification, formal assessment against criteria and other evidence or comments may be required;
  - * final statements/grades are agreed and entered in a record of achievement.

c **developing an integrated system of recording/reviewing progress**

- the system needs to link all the elements of action-planning, tutorial,recording of achievement in a single coherent system;the links should be explicit between the records and paperwork, the staff involved, and the use of time;
- it requires all teaching staff to be involved and to understand the system of assessment, recording and reviewing; their knowledge and valuing of the system (or the opposite) will be transmitted to learners;
- relevant information from the recording/review process should be fed back to appropriate teachers for future action; the process acquires greater relevance and status if the personal tutor has specialist subject knowledge and is involved in the course/programme.

Activities for core skills development

The sheets can be photocopied and used to:

1 audit and review existing core skills development

2 plan and identify priority areas for future action

They can be completed by individual lecturers, course or programme teams or curriculum managers.

Section 1 should be completed for the whole institution but otherwise one set of sections 2-5 should be completed for each course or programme area.

1 Institutional management

Principle that college senior management facilitate, encourage and value core skills development by its inclusion in college policies, strategies and quality management process

Activities	Current position *see key below*	Tick *if priority*	Description of proposed or completed activities *with dates*	Date form completed
a providing an institutional policy and strategy for core skills development				
1 a college policy on core skills covers all curriculum areas and all learners				
2 a whole-college core skills operational plan shows action to be taken, when and by whom				
3 audits of existing core skills work and staff expertise are conducted				
4 core skills development is linked to other college and national initiatives e.g. GNVQ, NRA, BTEC, TVEI				
b supporting core skills development by deployment of staff and resources				
1 a manager or group is designated as responsible for overall core skills development				
2 awareness-raising/staff development on core skills issues is provided, either separately or as part of other initiatives				
3 existing staff expertise and experience is used to aid development work with less experienced staff				

Activities	Current position *see key below*	Tick *if priority*	Description of proposed or completed activities *with dates*	Date form completed
4 teams develop core skills work within and across curriculum/subject areas				
5 timetables allow for meeting times for staff				
6 review/tutorial periods are provided for all learners				
7 a range of resources/learning environments is available for all learners				
8 action-planning/records of achievement/tutorials/review periods are part of a single coherent system, understood by teachers and learners				
9 core skills implementation and achievement are evaluated as elements of course review and/or quality management				

Course, subject, programme

Completed by (initials)

Key for current position
1 No progress yet
2 Under discussion
3 Agreed in principle
4 Being implemented
5 Not applicable/ not on agenda

2 Planning and developing the curriculum

Principle that core skills are developed within the curriculum through the activities of teaching teams and a framework for core skills is agreed and understood by all team members

Activities	Current position *see key below*	Tick *if priority*	Description of proposed or completed activities *with dates*	Date form completed
a using team meetings for core skills development				
1 all course/subject programme team members meet regularly even if not everyone is able to attend every meeting				
2 the definitions of core skills being used are understood by everyone in the team				
3 teaching/learning strategies and resources needed to develop competence in core skills are planned by the whole team				
4 work experience or community projects are planned by the team as vehicle for core skills development/experience				

Activities	Current position *see key below*	Tick *if priority*	Description of proposed or completed activities *with dates*	Date form completed
5 assessment and recording procedures for all core skills achievement are planned and understood by the whole team				
b carrying out an audit of existing core skills provision				
1 an audit of where core skills already exist in syllabi and/or whole programmes is carried out by learners and teachers				
2 precise definitions of core skills are used in carrying out the audit				
3 audit results are used to plan core skills development				

Course, subject, programme

Completed by (initials)

Key for current position
1 No progress yet
2 Under discussion
3 Agreed in principle
4 Being implemented
5 Not applicable/ not on agenda

3 Learner participation and action planning

Principle that learners are encouraged to understand and value core skills by the acknowledgment of previous achievement and relating of the skills to current and future learning needs

Activities	Current position *see key below*	Tick *if priority*	Description of proposed or completed activities *with dates*	Date form completed
a Improving learners' understanding of core skills				
1 learners' previous achievement in core skills is acknowledged e.g. through the National Record of Achievement				
2 the induction programme is used to introduce core skills to learners in a simple, comprehensible way				
3 individual action plans or learning agreements show core skills targets, teaching/learning strategies and resources				
4 methods by which core skills will be taught/learned are discussed with learners				
5 criteria by which learners' performance in core skills will be assessed and recorded are explained to them				
6 the action plan is combined with a continuous system for recording achievement				

Activities	Current position *see key below*	Tick *if priority*	Description of proposed or completed activities *with dates*	Date form completed
b encouraging learners' valuing of core skills				
1 the value of core skills in the whole college programme is discussed with learners				
2 learners identify where they learn/develop/use core skills				
3 the requirements of HE and employers in relation to core skills are discussed with learners				
4 UCCA/PCAS forms are considered for potential development and recording of achievement in core skills				
5 employers' requirements are ascertained through questionnaires, checklists advertisements etc.				

Course, subject, programme

Completed by (initials)

Key for current position
1 No progress yet
2 Under discussion
3 Agreed in principle
4 Being implemented
5 Not applicable/ not on agenda

4 Learning opportunities

Principle that learners are provided with opportunities to develop core skills in a range of learning situations and helped to improve their performance

Activities	Current position *see key below*	Tick *if priority*	Description of proposed or completed activities *with dates*	Date form completed
a using a range of teaching and learning strategies				
1 learner-centred activity is designed and delivered as part of the whole programme				
2 a range of opportunities is used for learners to develop core skills e.g. work-based assignments, group work, simulations, lectures, supported self-study, practical activities				
3 opportunities are provided for learners to develop process skills e.g. managing time, working with others, as well as written outcomes				
4 learners are given help and support in using the different types of learning in 2 and 3 above				

Activities	Current position *see key below*	Tick *if priority*	Description of proposed or completed activities *with dates*	Date form completed
5 before each assignment both teachers and learners understand and agree on the skills, knowledge and outcomes expected of learners				
b using a variety of learning environments				
1 a range of learning environments is used to develop core skills e.g. work experience, workshops, open access areas, laboratories, classrooms				
2 teachers/lecturers provide appropriate and adequate learning support in all environments				
3 both learners and teachers are trained to use different learning environments effectively				

Course, subject, programme

Completed by (initials)

Key for current position
1 No progress yet
2 Under discussion
3 Agreed in principle
4 Being implemented
5 Not applicable/ not on agenda

5 Assessing, recording and reviewing achievement

Principle that the recording and reviewing of achievement, including core skills, is included in all programmes of study and learners are helped to understand the criteria by which they are being assessed.

Activities	Current position *see key below*	Tick *if priority*	Description of proposed or completed activities *with dates*	Date form completed
a involving learners in the assessment/review process				
1 performance criteria for core skills assessment are made explicit to learners				
2 a variety of evidence of achievement in core skills is used e.g. oral work, observation of performance, written witness material, finished products, in addition to written outcomes				
3 the use of self, peer, and group assessment is encouraged				
4 learners are helped to identify and, where possible, transfer core skills to other areas of learning				
b structuring a recording and reviewing time				
1 specified periods of time for regular recording/reviewing of all achievement, including core skills, are built into the overall programme				

Activities	Current position *see key below*	Tick *if priority*	Description of proposed or completed activities *with dates*	Date form completed
2 review periods are structured around reviewing/recording of progress e.g. through coursework and assignments				
c developing an integrated system of recording/reviewing progress				
1 the recording/review process is part of the whole system of action planning and college/national records of achievement				
2 all teachers have some involvement in and understanding of the recording/reviewing process				
3 progress and achievement information is fed back to other teachers for future action and progression				

Course, subject, programme

Completed by (initials)

Key for current position
1 No progress yet
2 Under discussion
3 Agreed in principle
4 Being implemented
5 Not applicable/ not on agenda

A glossary

of core skill terms

a glossary
of core skill terms

One of the difficulties with this area of work has been and continues to be the proliferation of initiatives over the past decade. These initiatives have usually aimed to provide a broad and balanced curriculum which will enable the learner to develop the sort of skills, knowledge and understanding which they will need in employment, further or higher education and life in general. However, there has been little attempt to link the initiatives and each has developed in addition to the others, often resulting in confusion and duplication of effort.

One of FEU's aims is to encourage colleges, at management, course team and lecturer levels, to find ways of linking the current related initiatives across the college.

Another way to ease the confusion is to offer some clarification on the current usage of core skills and other similar or related terms. This section provides a simple guide, offering a list and interpretation of the most commonly used terms. Some originate from a specific organisation or initiative and are attributed to them; others are used in a more general way which we have interpreted according to current usage.The interpretations have been deliberately kept simple and where an organisation or initiative is involved, their own wording has been used as far as possible and further information can be obtained from them.

The table provides an *aide-memoire*, it does not attempt a detailed analysis and comparison of the terms or of their functions.

Aficionados will no doubt be able to add others to the list.

Term	Interpretation	Where originated	List of skills/characteristics
core	central part of different character from what surrounds it	Concise Oxford Dictionary	
core	areas of skills and knowledge considered central to a learner's work and life; developed through a learning programme	CPVE/Diploma of Vocational Education	• communication and social skills • applied numeracy • science, technology and IT • problem-solving • social, industrial and economic awareness • personal and career development • aesthetic and creative understanding
core subjects	compulsory subjects within the National Curriculum	National Curriculum Council (NCC)	• English • Mathematics • Science
subject core	central body of subject knowledge and understanding which must be offered in each A/AS syllabus by all examination boards	Schools Examination and Assessment Council (SEAC)	
core skills	set of transferable skills considered central to academic, vocational and personal development; emphasis on process/abilities	NCC with NCVQ terms in brackets	• communication • problem-solving • personal skills 1 improving own learning and performance 2 working with others • numeracy (application of number) • IT • modern language
		Youth Training Scheme (now YT)	• communication • problem-solving • number • practical skills

Term	Interpretation	Where originated	List of skills/characteristics
common skills	set of transferable skills similar to core skills but including additional skills and attitudes which develop personal effectiveness in working and adult life; common to all BTEC qualifications	BTEC	• communicating • managing tasks and solving problems • working with and relating to others • managing and developing self • applying numeracy • applying technology • applying design and creativity
core themes	a vehicle for the development of common skills and competences relevant to adult and working life; emphasis on skills and knowledge	BTEC	examples include: • economics • ideas • science and technology • language • people • industry • media
cross-curricular themes	strand of provision which will run through both national and post-16 curricula; emphasis on content, knowledge and understanding	NCC	• careers education and guidance • health education • economic and industrial understanding • environmental education • education for citizenship • scientific and technological understanding • aesthetic and creative understanding
core curriculum	general term describing the central, often compulsory, part of any qualification, syllabus or learning programme; usually consists of content, skills and knowledge	general use	

Term | Interpretation | Where originated | List of skills/characteristics

Term	Interpretation	Where originated	List of skills/characteristics
common core	general term usually associated with core curriculum (see above) where the core is common to all learners within or across qualifications or learning programmes	general use	
common learning outcomes	key experiences or opportunities to which all learners are entitled, regardless of their programme of study; emphasis on skills and experiences	TVEI	• communicate effectively • compile and use numerical information • use science and technology appropriately • understand the world of work • develop effective personal and interpersonal skills • work independently and in teams • solve problems • cope with change
common learning outcomes	core elements of vocational education and training to act as benchmarks of quality learning; emphasis on skills and knowledge	Confederation of British Industry (CBI) (*Towards a Skills Revolution*)	• values and integrity • effective communication • applications of numeracy • applications of technology • understanding of work and the world • personal and interpersonal skills • problem-solving • positive attitudes to change
core modules/core content	proposed method of providing compulsory content in a single post-16 qualification framework	Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR) (*Proposals for a British Baccalaureate*)	
core processes	a set of processes which provide forms of learner support, e.g. guidance and counselling	IPPR (*Proposals for a British Baccalaureate*)	• guidance and counselling • induction and diagnosis of need • formative assessment and learning support

Term	Interpretation	Where originated	List of skills/characteristics
core competences	the necessary skills, knowledge, attitudes and experience required for successful performance in a particular occupational area or role	FEU (*Core competences in Engineering*) and general use	
core entitlement	general term often used as for core curriculum (above) but usually indicates that learners are entitled to additions to compulsory curriculum requirements	general use	
entitlement curriculum	general term usually indicates that learners are entitled to additions to compulsory curriculum requirements	general use	
curriculum entitlement	a framework which covers all aspects of the curriculum: content and skills, plus delivery and support systems; emphasis on breadth, flexibility, competence, learner-centredness	TVEI/FEU	• competence/qualifications • records of achievement • work-related activities • flexible teaching and learning • guidance and counselling
common curriculum framework	a multi-layered framework of content, skills and processes, which would form the core of a common post-16 qualification	IPPR (as above)	
the core	used rather imprecisely as a catch-all phrase to denote all or any of the above; useful to avoid showing ignorance or when being specific is inappropriate	Concise Oxford Dictionary	

Term Interpretation Where originated List of skills/characteristics

75

Comments from colleges involved in the project on the use of FEU's principles and activities for core skills development.

'Particularly within the context of large colleges there is no doubt that the FEU Principles Actions will go along way in ensuring a consistent uniform development of core skills. There is a realisation amongst college staff that the concept of core common skills is here to stay and such a checklist of "Activities" is likely to be favourably received.'

'They offer a framework for teams to use and build on. The principles have been used as action plans to structure several team meetings. They have served as discussion documents to initiate development.'

'The availability of the Principles provide colleges with a clear and workable framework and set of reference points against which they can begin the process of generating discussion at all levels of the organisation on core skills and establishing a shared perception of what they are. It is through this process that staff will accept and own any development in this area, comparing present positions against a "bench mark" of performance criteria with the Principles could be said to represent.'

'As far as I am concerned having the Principles was a great help. They make an ideal starting point for any development on core skills that you would wish to make. It is important to realise that not everything needs to be covered at once, a concentrated effort in a limited area is realistic and manageable.'

'The listed objectives allowed teams to opt for specific areas and established at the outset a feeling of confidence that the development envisaged was attainable.'